

Undocumented Immigrant Population Data

United States Census

The United States Census does not determine whether residents are in the US legally. There is no portion of the Short Form asking about citizenship status, length of time in the US, or country of origin. The Long Form does ask for country of origin, and length of time in the US. Furthermore, the Long Form does ask if the person is a US citizen. However, the only non-citizen option is, “No, not a citizen of the United States.” There is no further classification such as Permanent Resident Alien, Lawful Permanent Resident, or Temporary Worker all of whom are legal residents, but not citizens. There is no specific classification for Undocumented Aliens, they too are lumped in the “Not a Citizen” category. Unless there is a legislative mandate requiring a change to be made, the 2010 Census will be conducted in the same manner.

JLARC Data

The information presented at the first Virginia Commission on Immigration meeting by JLARC was not from the Census Bureau, but rather the U.S Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS). INS gathered their data regarding undocumented immigrants with the following methodology:

“The INS estimates for January 2000 were derived using the residual technique: the legally resident population was estimated and then subtracted from the census-based foreign-born population, leaving estimated unauthorized residents as a residual. The estimates rely primarily on data from two sources: 1) annual INS statistics (immigrants admitted, deportable aliens removed, and nonimmigrant residents admitted); and 2) data for the foreign-born population from the 2000 Census.”¹

INS is no longer an agency, as most of its duties were transferred to the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. The research component of INS was moved to the Department of Homeland Security.

Office of Immigration Statistics:

The Office of Immigration Statistics is housed within the Department of Homeland Security and is now the federal agency responsible for immigration information. They have some updated information using the same methodology listed above, but using 2005 American Community Survey of the Census Bureau instead of the 2000 Census Data. Unfortunately, they only include the top 10 states because the methodology is so “sensitive” that using it with a sample size as small as Virginia would make the validity too low.

A representative from the Office of Immigration Statistics said the best person to consult is Jeffery Passel with the Pew Hispanic Center. He is one of the top researchers in this area in the US. Passel tends to use a similar methodology to the one described above, but he is willing to release more data (some of which may lack validity) than the Federal Government is willing to release. However, the lack of validity is shown by a disagreement between the Pew Hispanic Center which estimates Virginia has between 250,000 and 300,000 undocumented immigrants, and the Federation for American Immigration Reform which claims Virginia has about 205,000 undocumented immigrants.² Generally speaking, any information on the undocumented immigrant population will be derived by a similar methodology as is described above, and thus is at best an estimate.

¹ Office of Policy and Planning, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (2000). *Estimates of the unauthorized immigrant population residing in the United States: 1990 to 2000.*”

² Lizama, J.A. (2007, October 31). Report: Illegals in U.S. up sharply. *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.